



Caring to the end

*a guide to
the humane
dispatch of
livestock for
smallholders,
hobby farmers
and those
who keep
farm animals
as pets*

Humane Slaughter Association

Contents

Introduction	1
Making the decisions	2
Where? – Choosing a suitable location	4
How? – Selecting an appropriate method	6
Who? – Identifying the appropriate person	10
Arrangements for disposal	13
Conclusion	14

Published by
Humane Slaughter Association
The Old School, Brewhouse Hill,
Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8AN, UK
Tel: 01582 831919 Fax: 01582 831414
Email: info@hsa.org.uk Website: www.hsa.org.uk
Registered Charity No. 209563

© Humane Slaughter Association 2014

ISBN 1 871561 40 X

Introduction

Increasingly, farm animals are being kept in small numbers on hobby farms, for small-scale home production and as pets. The humane destruction of farm animals kept as pets is one of the least discussed aspects of their ownership, but the majority of owners will be faced with having to make the difficult decision of when and how to have an animal put down. It is important that, for the welfare of the animal, you are prepared and know exactly what options are available. It is your legal responsibility, and doubtless your wish, to ensure that your animal does not suffer any unnecessary pain or distress.

Reliable humane methods have been developed and adopted for dispatching livestock farmed on a commercial basis, and it is important that these methods are also used for farm animals kept on a non-commercial basis. This will ensure that the welfare of these animals is protected at a very critical time. Your veterinary surgeon will be able to advise on the best course of action, but it is up to you to prepare for such eventualities, so that you are able to make appropriate choices without delay.

This booklet sets out the various questions that you need to consider in order to reach the right decisions about where, how and by whom your animal should be put down, and how to dispose of the body. In the interest of your animal's welfare it is important to give the issue some thought before the decision is forced upon you.

The information provided here applies to farm animals (such as cattle, sheep, pigs, goats and llamas) which are kept on small-holdings or as pets. Poultry and horses are discussed in separate publications available from the HSA. Companion animals (for example, dogs and cats) are outside the scope of this booklet.

[Note: Superscript numbers within the text indicate the availability of useful documents that can be found on the internet; these website addresses are listed in full in Appendix A.]

Making the decisions

If you plan ahead and are aware of all the options available to you, this should minimise the risks to your animal's welfare.

There are four important questions that need to be considered:

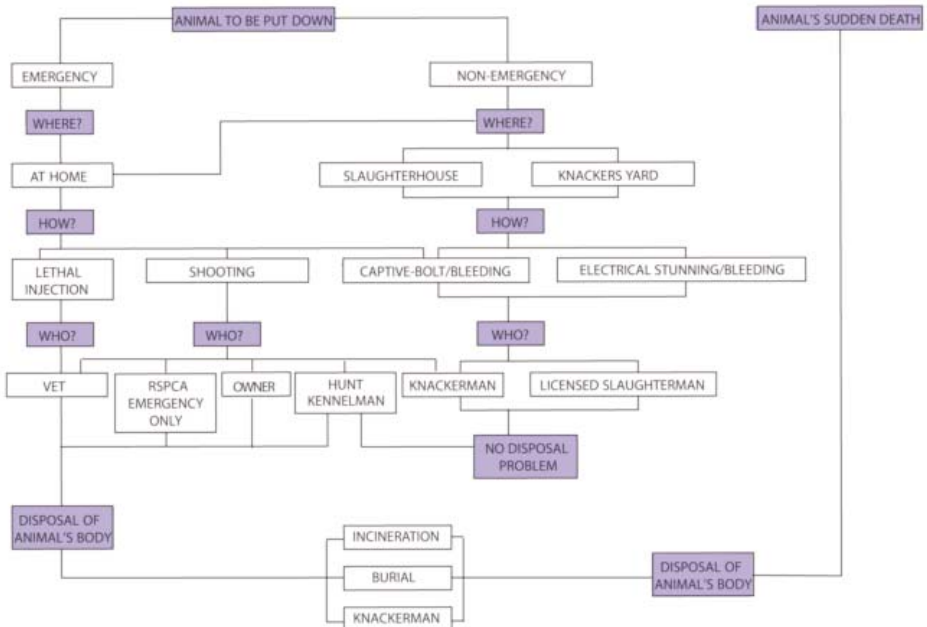
- 1. Where should your animal be dispatched?**
- 2. How should your animal be dispatched?**
- 3. Who should carry out the procedure?**
- 4. How should you dispose of the body?**

The flow chart on the following page may help you to reach a decision as to the best method and procedure to adopt. The remaining sections deal with each of these issues individually.

Before you consider how to kill the animal, you need to decide whether or not it will be offered for human consumption. If the animal is intended for sale for human consumption following slaughter, then it must be dispatched in an approved slaughterhouse. There are very limited circumstances where an animal slaughtered privately outside an approved slaughterhouse may be used for human consumption¹ and you are strongly advised to first consult with the Food Standards Agency and your local authority before you undertake this.

Making the decisions

If you own any bovine, ovine or caprine species, they are subject to Regulation (EC) 999/2001 (as amended) which aims to monitor, control and eradicate TSEs (Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies) in EU Member States; for example testing for BSE in bovines and scrapie in sheep and goats.² You should familiarise yourself with the rules for notification of fallen stock and the requirements when bovines over a certain age are sent to slaughter.³ The TSE Surveillance Helpline (freephone 0800 525 890 or 028 9262 1441 in Northern Ireland) can be used to notify the authorities of 'fallen' bovines over 24 months of age and 'fallen' sheep and goats over 18 months old.



Where? – Choosing a suitable location

In an emergency due to an accident or sudden illness it may be necessary for your animal to be dispatched without delay. This will usually have to take place at home and can be carried out by your veterinary surgeon, a knackerman, hunt kennelman or, as a last resort, an RSPCA inspector. A sick or injured animal may only be transported to the nearest available place of slaughter if it does not cause any unnecessary suffering. You will need to seek the advice of your veterinary surgeon if you wish to transport a sick or injured animal.

In a non-emergency situation you will need to consider whether it is best for the animal to be destroyed at home or in an approved slaughterhouse or knacker's yard.

1. At home

In most instances it will be less stressful for the animal if it is dispatched in familiar surroundings. If you decide that your animal should be dispatched at home (on-farm), there is time to decide on the most suitable place for this to be carried out and to make arrangements for the disposal of the body. You may wish to consider informing neighbours of what is happening and when. This will help to ensure that the procedure is carried out quickly and with the minimum disturbance.

2. Away from home

If there are problems with dispatch at home you will have to decide if the animal is fit to travel to the nearest slaughterhouse⁴ or knackers' yard. Under the *Welfare of Animals Transport Order 2006* it is illegal to transport an unfit animal. It would be advisable to seek your veterinary surgeon's opinion as to whether the

Where? – Choosing a suitable location

animal can be transported without causing it any unnecessary suffering. If, in the vet's opinion, the animal is not fit to travel, then arrangements will have to be made for it to be dispatched at home.⁵

If it is fit to travel then it may be possible to arrange for a local knacker company to collect the animal and transport it to their premises. Alternatively, it may be possible to arrange for an approved slaughterhouse to take the animal, although you will have to make your own arrangements for its transportation. If it is not for human consumption, the slaughterhouse will probably wish to deal with it at the end of the working day in order to comply with EU hygiene legislation.



[Note: If your animal has been registered you may need to notify the authorities⁶ of its death, eg return a cattle passport. If your animal is to be sent to a slaughterhouse, you should check if it requires a movement licence.⁷]

How? – Selecting an appropriate method*

You will need to consider whether your animal is to: (1) be shot by a free bullet; (2) be stunned by a captive-bolt and then bled; (3) be stunned electrically and then bled, or (4) receive a lethal injection. Your decision will be governed by whether the welfare of the animal will be compromised by a delay, who is available to dispatch it and the circumstances surrounding your decision to have the animal destroyed.

1. Shooting

You may decide to shoot your animal with a free-bullet (eg a humane killer or shotgun). A veterinary surgeon, a knackerman, a licensed slaughterman or, in an emergency, an RSPCA inspector may use this method to dispatch an animal. In an emergency and if your animal is in great pain, you as the owner are legally entitled to shoot your animal if you own a shotgun (or other appropriate firearm). If you have to shoot your animal, you need to be appropriately trained in the methods. Further information can be found in HSA Guidance Notes: *Humane Killing of Livestock Using Firearms*.

- A humane killer (usually a single-shot, ‘free-bullet’ pistol with a vented barrel) is a frequently used method, particularly by veterinary surgeons and knackermen. It is very important that only the correct ammunition is used. The muzzle of the gun is placed against the animal’s forehead and a bullet is fired into the brain resulting in instantaneous death. When using any

* This section introduces the types of methods available and what you might expect if others were to carry out these procedures. It is not possible here to give full details of the methods and associated safety concerns. For this, please see other, more detailed publications of the HSA, a list of which can be found on the HSA’s website.

How? – Selecting an appropriate method

free-bullet weapon it is possible the bullet may exit the animal's body and ricochet for up to one mile off concrete floors and walls. Animals should therefore be positioned on soft ground near a suitable back drop. Great care must be taken to get the direction of the shot correct when inside buildings.

- If a shotgun is used, the muzzle must be held 10–20 centimetres from the animal's forehead, aiming down the length of the neck into the animal's body. The muzzle of the shotgun **must not** be held directly against the animal's head as this will result in severe injury to the operator. In the hands of a competent operator shotguns are generally safer than free-bullet weapons.

Once shot, the animal will collapse and may bleed from the bullet hole, its nose and its mouth. After a minute the animal may twitch or convulse but this is normal and does not indicate consciousness.

2. Captive-bolt stunning

Alternatively, your animal could be stunned using captive-bolt equipment, followed by pithing or exsanguination to cause death. This method can be used where a free-bullet is impractical for reasons of safety. A vet, knackerman, licensed slaughterman or, in an emergency, an RSPCA inspector may use this method to kill an animal.

A captive-bolt stunner fires a retractable bolt against the animal's head and in many cases into the animal's brain, rendering it immediately unconscious. The animal will collapse, but there may be some involuntary movement of the limbs. There is likely to be some bleeding from the hole where the captive-bolt enters the head and also from the nose of the animal and you should be prepared for this. A rapid death is then ensured either by pithing or bleeding. Whilst both these procedures are humane when carried out correctly,

How? – Selecting an appropriate method

they may be distressing to watch. Pithing is the physical destruction of the brain by insertion of a cane or rod through the hole made by the bolt. During pithing the animal will initially exhibit violent muscle contraction, but it is important to remember that these are involuntary movements and this is normal in an animal that has been pithed correctly. It should also be noted that an animal that has been pithed must not be used for human or animal consumption.

3. Electrical stunning/killing

If you choose to dispatch your animal at a slaughterhouse, it is possible that the establishment may use electrical stunning or electrical stun-kill equipment. Electrical stunning equipment is designed to instantaneously render the animal unconscious, and ensure that it remains unconscious while the blood vessels in its throat, or at the base of the neck, are cut and it dies from loss of blood. Electrical stun-kill equipment is designed, as the name suggests, to stun the animal and then kill it by stopping the heart. However, to ensure that there is no chance of the heart restarting and the animal recovering consciousness, it will also be bled.

4. Lethal Injection

Apart from a very limited number of specified exemptions, veterinary surgeons are the only persons permitted to administer lethal injections to animals. The animal will be injected intravenously with a lethal overdose of anaesthetic drugs following, in some cases, initial injection of a sedative. The animal will rapidly lose consciousness and die.

When an animal dies by lethal injection there may be restrictions on how you dispose of the body as it cannot be used for human or animal consumption.

How? – Selecting an appropriate method

Some owners will wish to remain with their animal when it is being dispatched, others will not. Whatever your feelings about this, it is important that you take the advice of the person performing the task. If you are permitted to be present you must remain calm and follow instructions in order not to unsettle your animal and make the process more difficult.

**REMEMBER – YOUR ANIMAL’S WELFARE MUST
COME FIRST**



Who? – Identifying the appropriate person

The appropriate person to dispatch your animal will be a veterinary surgeon, knackerman, hunt kennelman or licensed slaughterman. All are likely to charge for their services. In an emergency and as a last resort, an RSPCA inspector may be able to assist. Your decision on who to employ will depend on their availability, where your animal is to be dispatched and the method to be used.

1. Veterinary surgeon

A veterinary surgeon should be the first person you call if your animal is involved in an accident which results in serious injury, or if it succumbs to a serious illness. Your vet will be able to advise if destruction is necessary. In an emergency the animal can be dispatched, either by lethal injection or with a humane killer or any other humane method to prevent the animal experiencing any further suffering. In the case of a lethal injection, only a vet may carry out this procedure. If you ask the vet to dispatch your animal it will be your responsibility to make arrangements for the removal of the carcass, but your vet should be able to provide help and advice.

2. Knackerman or hunt kennelman

Knackermen and hunts may provide a service for the removal of animals that have died at home, and may be available to destroy animals which have been involved in an accident, are old or sick. The knackerman may come to where your animal is kept to dispatch it, and may remove the carcass.

Knackermen have to be licensed and in order to locate an experienced operator in your area you can either speak to your vet, or contact your local authority or the Licensed Animal Slaughterers and Salvage Association (LASSA).

Who? – Identifying the appropriate person

3. Licensed slaughterman

The welfare of the animal is protected in the slaughterhouse, as it is everywhere else, by the *Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995* (WASK 95). All the slaughtermen involved in the handling of live animals must be fully trained and licensed. Even if the animal is not to be used for consumption, it may be possible to arrange for dispatch at a slaughterhouse.

4. Owner

You must only consider dispatching your animal yourself if you are competent to do so. You should have received training on how to carry out the procedure, you should use the correct equipment that is appropriate for the circumstances and you should be familiar with the legal requirements. Even if you have the training,



for the sake of the welfare of your animal it is important to be sure that you will be able to dispatch it confidently, quickly and humanely,⁸ particularly if you are likely to be upset by the situation. Failure to plan for and protect the welfare of your animal at this time could cause it to suffer, and as a result it may be considered that an offence was committed.

Who? – Identifying the appropriate person

Who	To consider	Cost
Veterinary surgeon (shooting or lethal injection)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will come out in an emergency • Prior arrangements for old or chronically ill animals • Arrangements must be made for carcass disposal, although most vets will help • Emergency slaughter of animals intended for human consumption and subsequently sent to a slaughterhouse if authorised by a vet, in line with food hygiene requirements.⁵ 	Normal call out charge plus cost of disposal of carcass
Knackerman (shooting or captive-bolt plus bleeding or pithing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually available in an emergency • Prior appointment for old or terminally ill animals • Will remove and dispose of the carcass • Will charge for a diseased or injected carcass 	Will vary across the country
Licensed slaughterman in an approved slaughterhouse (captive-bolt or electrical stunning plus bleeding)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only an option if the animal is fit to travel • Prior appointments • Transport will have to be arranged • Meat can be consumed by the owner and placed on the market 	Cost of transporting your animal to the slaughterhouse and a slaughterhouse charge if the animal is not for human consumption
Hunt kennelman (shooting or captive-bolt followed by bleeding or pithing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually available in an emergency • Will remove and dispose of the carcass • May take an injected carcass at an additional cost 	Will vary across the country
Owner (shooting with free projectile weapon eg shotgun)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If on-farm slaughter for private consumption⁸ - refer to Food Standards Agency.¹ • If immediate emergency killing • If sufficiently knowledgeable and trained • Legal obligations • May be difficult to achieve in practice (eg if there is an emotional attachment to animal) 	Disposal of carcass and/or by-products - contact your local authority

Arrangements for disposal

In the event of a sudden death, or if your animal is put down at home by your vet, you are likely to have to arrange for the disposal of its body. It would be sensible to find out what facilities are available⁹ in your area for cremation or incineration and then consider your options, including the costs involved. If your animal is suffering from disease or is put down by lethal injection, your options are likely to be more limited. Any animal by-products must also be disposed of according to Animal By-Product Regulations.¹⁰

1. Knackerman or hunt kennelman

The knackerman and hunt kennelman have traditionally provided a service to owners needing to destroy a farm animal and then have the body removed. The knackerman will usually provide a collection service at a cost. The hunt kennel may take the body away free of charge as food for hounds or to be disposed of by other methods, but a diseased animal will incur a charge.

2. Incineration (cremation)

Companies may accept and collect bodies of animals that have been shot, received a lethal injection or died of disease. It may be possible to arrange for ashes to be returned. Private cremation can be expensive.

The Licensed Animal Slaughterers and Salvage Association (LASSA) offers a nationwide service through its members. They may pick up the carcass and deliver it to a LASSA approved incinerator.

Arrangements for disposal

Alternatively, contact the Helpline of the Association of Private Pet Cemeteries and Crematoria for information on private cremation or burial (see Appendix B).

3. Burial

Since 1 May 2003 it has been illegal under the Animals By-Products Regulation (EC) No. 1774/2002 to dispose of fallen stock by burial on farm. However, the burial of dead animals is still permitted, but the exemption is restricted to “any animal belonging to a species normally nourished and kept, but not consumed, by humans for purposes other than farming”. Most farm animals kept as pets will not normally qualify for the exemption. However, local authorities (responsible for enforcement) deal with each case individually and should be contacted for further information.

If permission is given, burial will be limited to specific sites. If a suitable site can be found this can be a convenient option. If you are in any doubt about the suitability of a site you should contact your local Environment Agency office.

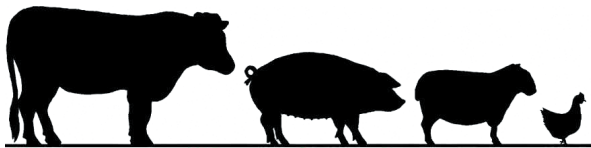
Conclusions

It is important to consider how you will deal with the ultimate dispatch of your animal. It is advisable to make plans so that you can cope with any eventuality. Always remember that your animal depends on you to make rational, informed decisions, frequently in difficult circumstances, and you must ensure that its welfare always takes priority.



WARNING: DISCLAIMER OF LIABILITY

The Humane Slaughter Association (HSA), in all its publications, does its best to produce accurate and up-to-date guidance. In no circumstances can the HSA accept liability for the way in which the advice and equipment outlined in this booklet are used, or for any loss, damage, death or injury caused thereby, since this depends on circumstances wholly outside the HSA's control. Those concerned with the slaughter or killing of animals should ensure that they are fully aware of all the legislative requirements.



Humane Slaughter Association

The Old School, Brewhouse Hill
Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8AN.

Tel: 01582 831919

Fax: 01582 831414

Email: info@hsa.org.uk

Web: www.hsa.org.uk